

23/01/2000

`ACA can investigate anyone'

Jalina Joheng

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim today dismissed claims that the Anti-Corruption Agency was not independent.

He said the ACA carried out its duties without fear or favour.

"It can investigate any individual, including myself, suspected to be involved in graft.

"It has been vested with the powers to investigate anyone alleged to be involved in corruption, regardless of their position," he said.

On claims that the agency practised double standards, Rais responded:

"To say that action was only taken against certain quarters, is not true."

He said this was proven by the fact that several politicians in the ruling party and government officers have also been taken to task.

Rais was speaking to reporters after attending a Hari Raya gathering at the ACA headquarters in Jalan Duta today.

Also present were ACA director-general Datuk Ahmad Zaki Husin and deputy director-general (operations) Datuk Mohd Zawawi Nordin.

Rais said the agency detained 283 people last year, compared with 300 in 1998, for graft offences.

Of this, 154 were civil servants, 127 private sector employees and members of the public, and two politicians.

During this time, the agency received 7,829 tip-offs, compared with 9,443 in 1998.

On the ACA's request for additional manpower, Rais said the Government would respond positively to the proposal to be submitted by the agency.

This is to ensure it would be able to operate effectively and efficiently.

On the recent call by opposition leaders to make the ACA responsible to Parliament and not the Prime Minister's Department, Rais said the Government respected the opinion.

"However, they (the opposition) should give the agency time to prove its ability to curb corruption in the country," he said.

Asked to comment on former deputy prime minister Tun Ghafar Baba's recent statement that contests for the top two Umno posts would strengthen the party, Rais said:

"One is entitled to one's opinion regarding what is proper and what is not in any political party."

He added that it must be understood that the supreme council had only advised that there be no contest. It had not given any directive.

"It would be up to the divisions to adhere to it or not."

Ghafar had recently said that while there was nothing wrong with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in their present positions, contests would only further strengthen their positions in the party.

(END)